

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 116

By Gilmore

A RESOLUTION to support children of incarcerated parents by directing the Tennessee Department of Corrections to examine the National Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated and update the 1995 report on Children and Families of Incarcerated Felons.

WHEREAS, the President of the United States has mentioned children of prisoners in his first four State of the Union speeches and his intent to serve them; and

WHEREAS, there are more than three million children with an incarcerated parent in prison or jail in our country; and

WHEREAS, one out of every eight children of African-American descent has a parent in prison; and

WHEREAS, one out of every ten children of all racial backgrounds has an incarcerated parent; and

WHEREAS, these children face numerous risk factors, including poverty, inadequate care, and loss of the care-giving parent, in most cases, the mother; and

WHEREAS, the household income diminishes when a parent goes to prison; and

WHEREAS, these children live with shame, stigma, silence, and an 11 percent higher rate of suicide than other at-risk children, due to despair and hopelessness; and

WHEREAS, there is little support for these children to help cope in healthy ways during their parents' absence; and

WHEREAS, these children seldom are able to visit their parents, and they wish for more contact; and

WHEREAS, the relatives of such children are the persons most likely to be caring for the children, with little financial or community support; and

WHEREAS, the Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated provides guiding principles for addressing the needs of these at-risk children; and

WHEREAS, the Summary Report of the Tennessee Criminal Justice Summit of 2006 sets a goal for Tennessee to reduce and stop the intergenerational cycle of crime and to target children of incarcerated parents as a part of this strategy; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we hereby urge the Department of Corrections to examine the National Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated and to incorporate appropriate principles in the Bill of Rights to assist Tennessee in achieving its goal to reduce and stop intergenerational crime by providing better support for children of incarcerated parents.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we hereby urge the Department of Corrections to work with other appropriate departments and state agencies to update the 1995 Report of the Children and Families of Incarcerated Felons, which examined the social cost to families, the higher risk for children with incarcerated parents to have problems academically, socially, and emotionally, and the greater likelihood that these children will be incarcerated at some point in their lifetime.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that based upon the results of such an updated study, that the Department of Corrections work with appropriate state, local, and community agencies to craft policies, practices, and programs that will lead to less harmful and improved practices for the welfare of the children in our state who endure the loss of their parents to incarceration.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Department of Corrections shall issue an updated report to every member of the General Assembly no later than April 1, 2008. Such report shall also include a strategic plan outlining a coordinated approach with appropriate state, local, and community agencies to improve policies, practices, and programs to support the children of incarcerated parents.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.